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VOX CLAMANTIS

A Comparison

Analytical and Critical

between the

‘**Columbus at Seville**’

of Joseph Ellis—*Pickering*, { 1st Edition, 1869
2nd Edition, 1876

and the

‘**Columbus**’

of the Poet Laureate—*Kegan Paul & Co.*, 1880

by

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Not long ago the writer of these pages had occasion to collate documents of an important bearing on the life and achievements of Christopher Columbus. Many works were consulted both in Italian and English, and, among the latter, a volume by the Poet Laureate, entitled 'Ballads and other Poems' including a Monologue headed 'Columbus.' The publishers of this work were Messrs. Kegan Paul and Co.,—the date of publication being 1880.

I found in this monologue some attractive lines. It was my first perusal of 'Columbus.' It was the first time, too, that I had read 'Rizpah.' But why did 'Rizpah' strike me as new, while 'Columbus' had a stale or hackneyed look—a *réchauffé* of a dish served somewhere else? Had I read 'Columbus' in another volume? Had it appeared in a magazine—in the *Nineteenth Century* for instance? I made prompt inquiry, and discovered that the poem in question saw the light for the first time in this

volume,—being, as announced, a literary offshoot of the year 1880.

But it so happened, that I possessed an old discarded commonplace-book, in which, from time to time, I had copied passages from works that pleased me,—principally short poems and extracts from longer ones. Tennyson's volume had long since been laid aside, when one day this book of extracts came under my notice while engaged in sorting and destroying papers. Should I preserve that little book? I glanced at its contents carelessly at first and then attentively; the words 'Columbus at Seville' met my gaze, and under this heading a selection of passages in blank verse taken from a volume entitled 'Cæsar in Egypt' dated, in my own handwriting, October 12th, 1878. I took from the shelf Tennyson's 'Ballads and other Poems,' and re-reading the 'Columbus' of 1880, carefully compared it with the extracts I had made from 'Columbus at Seville.' And what did I discover? That they were one and the same thing? No! not quite. But I discovered something very startling, something which sent me off post-haste to a bookseller's shop, there to order 'Cæsar in Egypt' in its complete form.

This book, containing some 350 pages, written by one Joseph Ellis, was first published by Basil Montague Pickering, under date London, 1869, second edition

1876. My extracts were made, as above stated, two years later, and probably about that time I had seen the book at a friend's house and borrowed it. But this point is immaterial. What I have to consider is the connection between the 'Columbus' of the Poet Laureate, and the 'Columbus at Seville' of Mr. Ellis. Nay, it is quite possible that my readers, like myself, may consider it a question of—kleptomania! My respect for Lord Tennyson is very great, and I will not permit myself a stronger expression.

The case, as it stands, is very clear, and may be stated somewhat as follows: The Laureate took something from Mr. Ellis. What was that something? He did not say: 'I want a lucifer; will you lend me one, as I wish to light a fire?' He did not *ask*; he took; and he took more than a lucifer; he took Mr. Ellis's fuel, and piled it on his grate, lighting it up at his leisure, *sans cérémonie*. Hence the fire of inspiration (if such it be) which afterwards blazed up in the poem known as 'Columbus.' The words 'at Seville' were dropped from the title. And why? I do not know. Watches have been taken from gentlemen's pockets before now; but rarely, if ever, are the chains taken also, the watches being deftly twisted off. If 'Columbus' were a watch, I should be prompted to call 'at Seville' the chain. But in so doing I should, of

course, speak in a Parliamentary, or Pickwickian, sense; for this, as I have said, is a case of kleptomania, and, as such, ought not to be judged harshly. Who can be harsh with the writer who, without the slightest fuss or ostentation, took from Mrs. Gaskell the plot of 'Sylvia's Lovers' and turned it into 'Enoch Arden'? No; I will merely show to what extent, and with what success, the Laureate has embodied the words and ideas of Mr. Ellis, and why, in a future issue of his 'Ballads and other Poems' he ought to 'render unto *Cæsar in Egypt* that which is *Cæsar's*,' and only, in new editions, reprint so much of his work as he (the Laureate) can justly claim.

The poem of 'Columbus' opens as follows:—

'Chains, my good lord: in your raised brows I read
Some wonder at our chamber ornaments.
We brought this iron from our isles of gold.
Does the king know you deign to visit him
Whom once he rose from off his throne to greet
Before his people, like his brother king?
I saw your face that morning in the crowd.
At Barcelona—tho' you were not then
So bearded. Yes. The city deck'd herself
To meet me, roar'd my name; the king, the queen
Bad me be seated, speak, and tell them all' etc.

Mr. Ellis wrote thus:—

'They rose to me as sovereigns to sovereign:
When I would offer homage, me upheld,

And bade me sit with them, as should a king—
 'The king of realms more vast and rich than theirs!
 And then, the cavalcade through Barcelona ;
 Came forth the chivalry of Spain to greet me—
 Still in mine eyes the signs of welcome glisten,
 Still in mine ears the shouts of welcome ring !'

Who can doubt that these lines, although differing in texture and arrangement, were the ground-work of the thought in Tennyson's poem, and served, so to speak, as a far-off model? He is much too clever an artist not to be able, at times, to hide the sources of his inspiration ; but plagiarism is like murder ; sooner or later it will 'out,' and in more ways than one, as we shall presently see.

After referring to 'the great Laudamus' which 'rose to heaven' in lieu of Mr. Ellis's 'Te Deum' which 'went to heaven,' the Laureate proceeds in these terms:—

'Chains for the Admiral of the Ocean ! chains
 For him who gave a new heaven, a new earth,'

What counterpart have we for these two lines?

'In manacles the finder of a world !'

Surely this is better? No obscurity here, and no bad rhythm. Clearly the Laureate could not adopt the word 'manacles;' for that was the identical word employed by his precursor. But he could use a synonym, or quasi synonym ; and he did so. It was seemingly a part of his

plan to paraphrase as much as possible,—shirking, as we have seen, the words ‘*Te Deum*’ to use the word ‘*Laudamus*,’ and fighting shy of the expression ‘went to heaven,’ in favour of his own ‘rose to heaven,’ and all this, to give to the borrowed line a smack of novelty, as one might dye a borrowed coat to prevent its recognition. Albert Smith once remarked of the French soldiers that they were clad in red trousers because English troops wore red coats, adding that the same spirit of pettish opposition characterized the conduct of the French washerwomen, who, as a rule, cleanse their clothes outside the tub, because the washerwomen of this country wash theirs within it. The Laureate, in the course of his poem, reminds us forcibly of both these examples. For when the author of ‘*Columbus at Seville*’ dresses one part of his thought in bright red, the author of ‘*Columbus*’ puts the red in another part and so alters the costume. And in a similar way he imitates the French washerwoman. Over and over again he washes the clothes of Mr. Ellis, but he washes them outside the tub, and not inside, as his exemplar does. But let us proceed with our investigation.

‘Chains!’ says the Laureate, ‘we are Admirals of the Ocean, we, We and our sons for ever.’

He seems to like ‘Admirals of the Ocean.’ And why? Because it is good? Because there is point and meaning

in it? Hardly for this, one would think! Are not all admirals *ipso facto* admirals of the ocean? Sea-faring commanders are not called colonels; and colonels or generals, commanding the land forces, are not known as admirals. Perhaps the Laureate likes the expression because it is strictly his own, and not in any way taken from another. Mr. Ellis is satisfied with Columbus' real title, viz., 'High Admiral.' The Laureate continues as follows:—

'Our guerdon not alone for what we did,
But our amends for all we might have done—
The vast occasion of our stronger life—
Eighteen long years of waste, seven in your Spain,
Lost, showing courts and kings a truth the babe
Will suck in with his milk hereafter—earth
A sphere.

Were *you* at Salamanca? No.
We fronted there the learning of all Spain,
All their cosmogonies, their astronomies :

* * * * *

No guess work ! I was certain of my goal

* * * * *

* * * could it be

That trees grew downward, rain fell upward, men
Walk'd like the fly on ceilings?"

The reader will please to note this about the flies, and other words in the above quotation, bearing in mind, as we have said, that they were published by Tennyson

in 1880, four years after the publication of 'Columbus at Seville.' What says Mr. Ellis?

'May ye inherit, and deserve the guerdon !

* * * * *

Those eighteen years of earnest hope suppress'd,

* * * * *

Outspent in care, and penury, and scorn.

* * * * *

Of the rotund formation of the Earth ? etc.

* * * * *

Then that strong strife of tongues, at Salamanca ;

Then stood I forth to argue with the Junta ;

To tell to men of schools and catechisms

What God had taught me—God alone could teach.

* * * * *

Yet helping forward daily to the goal, etc.

* * * * *

How can the mind have peace

The goal ungain'd, etc., etc.

Or, "Thou dost think that men feet upwards walk,

Like as the flies upon the ceiling there !"

Now this sentence about the flies is very important. Not poetically speaking ; not as a specimen of thought, or rhythm, or eloquence. Nothing of all this. It is important as evidence. It is a clue, a link in a chain, a something about which a detective, hunting for information, would be apt to rejoice greatly ; and with reason. It is the cipher on the spoon ; the mark on the lost linen. Why, in the name of Kleptomania, did the Laureate take a line so little worth taking ? Was it not easy to invent

another simile? To speak, for instance, of ships sailing upside down, with their masts in the water, or fishes running up trees? And whilst disregarding the figure, found in his model, of ships returning ‘uphill to Spain,’ he introduces other and similar illustrations of his argument. Alas! it is easy to preach; and easy to bear other people’s headaches; easy, too, to say, ‘Thus shouldst thou do, and thus shouldst thou *not* do.’ But how was the Laureate to know that a work so apparently obscure as ‘Cæsar in Egypt, Costanza, and other Poems’ would be drawn up out of the depths of contemporary publications to be confronted with his ‘Ballads and other Poems,’—a book which everyone was buying as a needful or fashionable addition to the library, or the drawing-room table? How could anyone in his senses suppose the ‘Leading Poet’ of Great Britain and Ireland capable of taking hints, words, and thoughts from a comparatively unknown author? How could a captain be beholden to a subaltern,—an Alfred Tennyson to a Joseph Ellis? It was not possible. The Laureate felt he was safe. And if not safe, what matter? The king can do no wrong, and the court-poet of Great Britain and Ireland cannot possibly be guilty of theft.

But *revenons à nos moutons*. Let us return to the flies. I have said these flies were not worth taking. But I must now say that they are typical flies, ornamental flies,

—almost legendary, if not historical ; for the Laureate has made them precious. Like the Geese of the Capitol which saved Rome, these flies have saved ‘Cæsar in Egypt.’ Tennyson was invading Ellis’s book, and these flies come to the front and buzz in the face of the invader. Let us be grateful to them. Let us enshrine them in our minds ; let us put them in the amber of our memory, and call them ‘Tennyson’s flies,’ because they are not Tennyson’s. They are no loss to Ellis. He who has beaten Tennyson as a writer of Sonnets can well spare these flies. Will the Laureate care to keep them now they have done duty as detectives ?

The Laureate’s poem, after glancing at the fidelity of Columbus as a Christian, true to the Church in which he was brought up, namely the Church of Rome, proceeds :—

‘ I have accomplish’d what I came to do. . .
 Not yet—not all—last night a dream—I sail’d
 On my first voyage, harass’d by the frights
 Of my first crew, their curses and their groans.
 The great flame-banner borne by Teneriffe,
 The compass, like an old friend false at last
 In our most need, appall’d them, and the wind
 Still westward, and the weedy seas—at length
 The landbird, and the branch with berries on it,
 The carven staff—and last the light, the light
 On Guanahani !’

This is just passable verse ; but let us have some

poetry! Let us turn to 'Columbus at Seville' for the original of the above explosion:—

'The needle varies! whither do they go?
A course, they say, where Nature's self hath doubt!
The land was lost, the trade-wind sped to west,
The singing birds, as heavenly harbingers!
And herbage floating from some neighbouring shore.

* * * * *

At earliest break of dawn they shouted "Land"!'

The players in *Hamlet* said something about the 'mobled queen' of which Polonius approved; but would the 'weedy seas' of the Laureate have met his approbation? I think not. A bright picture is drawn by Mr. Ellis; a very confused one is painted by the Laureate; and the paints he uses are dim and clammy. How spasmodic too are the words:—

'and last the light, the light
On Guanahani!'

the lines of the model being:—

'The light of heaven was in me, and I saw
A light of earth from forth the latent world;'

I much prefer the ring and swing of the extract from the earlier poem. And (to quote from Polonius again) I must condemn 'weedy seas' as 'an ill phrase, a vile phrase,' almost as bad as the Laureate's 'banner of England blew,' which occurs six times in the poem on 'The Defence of Lucknow.'

The Laureate's Columbus thus continues his soliloquy:—

‘ There came two voices from the Sepulchre,
 Two friars crying that if Spain should oust
 The Moslem from her limit, he, the fierce
 Soldan of Egypt, would break down and raze
 The blessed tomb of Christ ; whereon I vow’d
 That, if our Princes hearken’d to my prayer,
 Whatever wealth I brought from that new world
 Should, in this old, be consecrate to lead
 A new crusade against the Saracen,
 And free the Holy Sepulchre from thrall.’

The blank verse here rises to a higher level, but not to a higher degree of originality ; for here, as elsewhere, we find traces of Ellis,—footprints on the shifting sands of literature, which show where another man has stood, where he has tarried for a moment to collect his thoughts, and where he has branched off in new directions. These are the words of the Columbus of Mr. Ellis:—

* * * * *

‘ At Genoa garner’d, shall the fund augment,
 Which I have set apart to be applied
 To last redemption of the sacred tomb. *
 Then spake I that great vow—to pay to God,
 Out of the revenues to me assigned,
 Suffice the Holy Sepulchre to save.

* * * * *

the Holy Sepulchre

Will not by me be rescued ;

* * * * *

Then, then it was that I the queen besought

To make the treasures of the new-found world
Redeem the Holy Sepulchre, and wrest
From that proud Soldan false, the sacred shores.'

Here we have the Laureate evading 'proud Soldan' to adopt 'fierce Soldan,'—as being more original—and more fair to the author of 'Cæsar in Egypt.' Further on we have some talk about money, and a reference to the palaces of the Great Khan, which is too good to be overlooked. The Laureate says:—

'Gold? I had brought your princes gold enough
If left alone! Being but a Genovese,
I am handled worse than had I been a Moor,
And breach'd the belting wall of Cambalu,
And given the great Khan's palaces to the Moor,
Or clutch'd the sacred crown of Prester John,
And cast it to the Moor: but had I brought
From Solomon's now-recover'd Ophir all
The gold that Solomon's navies carried home,
Would that have gilded *me*? Blue blood of Spain,
Tho' quartering your own royal arms of Spain,
I have not: blue blood and black blood of Spain,' etc.

The following quotations from 'Columbus at Seville' will show where the Laureate got the groundwork of all this:—

'The cry was "gold";
My power was gold, and power must be maintain'd.
More gold—and more,

* * * * *

Where he, great Khan, and Prester John held kingdom.

* * * * *

The same, I think, as onetime Ophir named—
Sought by King Solomon for the Holy Temple.

* * * * *

My own insignia quarter'd with the King's,'

Who with eyes to see and ears to hear can miss the significance of these quotations, or, reading the passages aloud, escape the conviction that the ring of the rhythm in the Laureate's poem is purloined from that of Ellis? The 'Great Khan' is trotted out by the Laureate in company with 'Prester John' much as the keeper of a circus and menagerie newly arrived in a town occupied by a predecessor would parade in the streets *his* camel and *his* elephant, by way of showing that he, too, has wonderful creatures in his collection. Why should he omit to mention his 'Ophir,' when the earlier author sets him an example? All is copied,—even the blaring of trumpets and the beating of the big drum.

Further on in the Laureate's poem we have :—

'Ah God, the harmless people whom we found
In Hispaniola's island-Paradise !'

by way of make-weight to Ellis's

'And then our new-world home, Hispaniola,

* * * * *

Eke, but for man, a heaven terrestrial !'

Again, in Tennyson's poem we have :—

'And I myself, myself not blameless, I
Could sometimes wish I had never led the way.'

which, horrible as it is, is assuredly a re-clothing of the thought contained in the following lines of Ellis:—

‘Not to me,
Oh Good Creator ! not to me, impute
These sufferings of Thy creatures,—not to me !
This breedeth some compunction in my heart.’

And how about the Laureate’s excellent lines :

‘This creedless people will be brought to Christ
And own the holy governance of Rome.’

contrasted with the original author’s

‘beauteous regions unexplored,
Yet to be peopled in the faith of Christ !’

Surely, without a microscope, a man capable of perceiving thoughts enshrined, or hidden, in words, may see the connection between the lines of the Laureate and those of Ellis. Thoughts as well as words may be paraphrased. A poacher may trap a hare and kill it and skin it, and a plagiarist may in the same way manipulate a line or a verse, and make it appear to the rightful owner something seemingly different—a maimed, or a ghastly thing, but not a new thing or a better one. Let us take an example. Suppose a would-be poet, after perusing ‘Paradise Lost,’ began his epic with the words

‘Of man’s first mutiny and the fatal fruit
Of that grim tree whose taste was death and doom,’

—suppose, in writing thus, that he avoided the word ‘disobedience’ in favour of the word ‘mutiny,’ and spoke of ‘death and doom’ instead of ‘death into the world and all our woe,’—would he be writing original verse?

The Laureate thus proceeds in his treatment of ‘Columbus,’ keeping at times alongside of the original, and at times somewhat removed from it :—

‘our Holy Catholic Queen,
 Who fain had pledged her jewels on my first voyage,
 Whose hope was mine to spread the Catholic faith,
 Who wept with me when I return’d in chains,
 * * * * *
 She is gone——’

Let us contrast with these lines a passage or two from the first ‘Columbus’ poem :—

‘For my own crown of Castile will I do it,
 E’en though I pledge my jewels.
 * * * * *
 But when, at seeing me, the Queen did weep,
 I wept to think those eyes should weep for me !
 The Queen is dead ;
 * * * * *
 Why then art thou gone ?’

Here we have the ‘Queen is dead,’ instead of ‘She is gone;’ and later on the words, ‘Why then art thou gone?’ So it is clear,—is it not?—that in this part of the poem, there has been no copying! Yea, verily; and in this way a man might write a perfectly original verse in

lieu of the first stanza of Campbell's 'Hohenlinden,' namely :—

'In Austria when the moon was high
All leafless lay the ground, and dry,
And sweet as summer was the sigh
Of Danube rolling sluggishly.'

instead of the well-known lines :—

'On Linden when the sun was low
All bloodless lay the untrodden snow,
And dark as winter was the flow
Of Iser rolling rapidly.'

And every candid reader would acknowledge, of course, that the Danube lines were perfectly original, having scarcely a word in common with the lines about the Iser. Such originality would find a counterpart in the originality of the Laureate, when, in paraphrasing the language of Ellis, he artfully employs words aggressively unlike those chosen by the author of 'Cæsar in Egypt.' For it is not always convenient while borrowing thoughts to repeat the actual words to which they are mated; and slight deviations in expression are at once handy and politic in the case of plagiarists and literary depredators who do their best to escape detection. Do I call the Laureate a depredator? Heaven forbid! I merely call him a plagiarist. 'Only this and nothing more,' as Poe's

Raven was so fond of saying. Would a poem entitled the 'Gentleman of the Pond' contain a plagiarism of the title of the 'Lady of the Lake,' made famous by Scott? Assuredly it would; though a 'pond' is not strictly speaking a 'lake,' and a 'lady' is the very opposite of a 'gentleman.' No; I have too much reverence for the author of 'Locksley Hall' and the 'Lotus Eaters' to call him a depredator. But must a lover of literature, when the plagiarist happens to be a Poet Laureate, shut his eyes to the fact of his plagiarisms? I beg pardon of all admirers of Lord Tennyson (being myself one of them) if in the course of my remarks I have in any way wounded their feelings. Mine is the plea of Brutus:—It is not that I love the Laureate less, but that I love literature more.

In conclusive justification of my impeachment—I append, without comment, further citations, in juxtaposition:

1876.

To track the pathless ocean needed
one,
A host can follow him, and share
the gain.

Whose intercession brought me to
the Queen.

* * *

Who, with the good St. Angel,
call'd me back,
When, in a brief despair, I fled
from Spain.

* * * * I,
Columbus, am henceforth 'High
Admiral.'

The Sovereigns say it; read the
royal rescript!

To search? ah, no—but certainly
to find!

* * *

But what in them was prayer, in
me was thanks,—

* * *

Who shall unveil the mystery of
faith?

But unto me, in secret, all was well.

1880.

The first discoverer starves—his
followers, all
Flower into fortune—

And thought to turn my face from
Spain,

* * but our Queen

Recall'd me.

* the Admiral of the Ocean!

* * * Ferdinand
Hath sign'd it and our Holy
Catholic queen—

Guess-work! they guess'd it *
* * *

No guess-work! I was certain of
my goal;

1876.

Those faint, rebellious spirits, mur-
muring loud,

* * *

Threatening to stay, and do they
knew not what,

Exasperate, fearing that they could
not turn.

* * * and I saw
A light of earth from forth the
latent world ;

King Ferdinand, and gracious
Ysabel.

* * *

They both, in thankful adoration,
knelt—

Due fealty yielding to the King of
kings.

When I to them my wondrous tale
had told,

* * *

Wise Ferdinand, sweet-smiling
Isabella !

Fonseca ! * * *
A bishop hinders what a king com-
mands.

1880.

* harass'd by the frights
Of my first crew, their curses and
their groans.

* and last the light, the
light
On Guanahani !

* * the king, the queen,
Sank from their thrones, and
melted into tears,
And knelt, and lifted hand and
heart and voice
In praise to God

* * the king, the queen
Bad me be seated, speak, and tell
them all
The story of my voyage,

* * our prudent king,
our righteous queen—

Fonseca my main enemy at their
court,

1876.

* * * they sent
A Bovadilla to subvert my power.

* * He has seized thy
house,
Thine ownings plunder'd, * *

* * dear Bartholomew !
To prison go we, linked as galley-
slaves.
* * *
Thus—thus to Spain,

May I not think of thee, base
Bovadilla,
When thou wert lost, and my weak
barque was spared ?

The Eden told as man's first dwell-
ing-place.
I say not but that here the freshet
flows
From out the fountain of the Tree
of Life.

1880.

They send me out his tool, Bova-
dilla,

* * * who sack'd
My dwelling, seized upon my
papers *

Drove me and my good brothers
home in chains.

They send me out * *
Bovadilla
* * *
The seas of our discovering over-
roll
Him and his gold ; the frailer
caravel,
* * * came happily
to the shore.

And saw the rivers roll from Para-
dise !

1876.

Lo, then my soul had succour, for
 I saw
 Bright visions of the night, and
 heard my God ;—

‘Why frettest thou, O man, and
 losest heart ?
 * * *
 Have not I promised thou shalt be
 sustain’d ?’

I thought, that Christ, my Lord,
 was one time bound,
 With scorn assailed, and flagellate
 with thongs.

Has not the beam celestial lit my
 path ?
 Has not miraculous care o’er-
 shadow’d me ?
 Have not I heard soft whispers
 from the skies ?

1880.

* * last night a dream
 * * * and I saw
 The glory of the Lord flash up
 * *
 * * O my lord,
 I swear to you I heard His voice
 * *

‘O soul of little faith, slow to be-
 lieve !
 Have I not been about thee from
 thy birth ?’

‘Endure ! thou hast done so well
 for men, that men
 Cry out against thee : was it other-
 wise
 With mine own Son ?’

‘Have I not * * *
 * * *
 Set thee in light till time shall be
 no more ?’
 * * * And God
 Hath more than glimmered on
 me. * *
 * * *
 I know that He has led me all my
 life,
 * * *
 * * and more than once
 * * I heard his voice.

1876.

* * I have not done
my work.

Warring, heartsick, with lust, and
pride, and greed.

Eke, but for man, a heaven terres-
trial !

What rights had we above these
simple men ?

This breedeth some compunction
in my heart,

I pray thee to the throne, and
plead my cause :

Unjust reproach ! that I was alien,
—stranger ;

And on the Earth to me shall
justice come !

To me will come, and men will
say—‘ COLUMBUS.’

1880.

I am not yet too old to work his
will—

* * * the lust,
Villainy, violence, avarice, of your
Spain.

* Hispaniola’s island-Para-
dise !

Ah God, the harmless people
whom we found

And I myself, myself not blame-
less, I

* * I pray you tell
King Ferdinand

I am but an alien and a Genovese.

Then some one standing by my
grave will say

‘ Behold the bones of Christopher
Colòn ’ (*sic*).

Whatever, in my love of literature, I may have said about the kleptomania of our Poet Laureate, I am bound to admit that in his 'Columbus' he is original in one particular, but this unfortunately does not prevent his originality being wrong. I looked into the records, and found them to be directly opposed to the idealization of 'Columbus' as presented by Lord Tennyson. Bartolommeo de Las Casas, whose father was the companion of the Discoverer, thus describes him:—'He was tall and well-formed, his complexion fair and inclined to ruddy; his nose aquiline, his eyes light-grey and apt to kindle. He was simple in his dress and mode of living. His sharp temper was kept well under control. He was eloquent when the discourse ran on high topics, affable and fascinating in ordinary intercourse, and his domestic amiability was as charming as his public demeanour was elevated and dignified. His devoutness was of an enthusiastic kind, and he was noted for his strict attention to the offices of religion.'

Another contemporary author describes Columbus as follows:—'He was grave, though courteous in his deportment, circumspect in his words and actions, irreproachable in his morals, and exemplary in his religious duties.'

How, I ask, do these extracts agree with the *grossièretés* put into the mouth of Columbus by the Poet Laureate? To judge from these—especially from their tone and

manner, Columbus could be no better than a rude buccaneer, a braggart and a bully. I know not where to find in English literature the equal of the following passage for lax yet bombastic composition. The punctuation is the Laureate's.

‘ * we are Admirals of the Ocean, we,
We and our sons for ever. Ferdinand
Hath sign'd it and our Holy Catholic Queen
Of the Ocean—of the Indies—Admirals we—
Our title, which we never mean to yield,
Our guerdon not alone for what we did,
But our amends for all we might have done—
The vast occasion of our stronger life——’

Here, in the course of eight lines, are no less than seven ‘we’s’ and six ‘our’s,’ to say nothing of inconsistency in style and purport, as compared with the well-known historical typification of a modest, courageous and benevolent man. Are we to suppose that Columbus was, like our Poet Laureate, *supra grammaticam*? Would he talk like a pirate, bluster like a despot, and swagger like a mountebank? Who can believe it? Yet, sad to say, such is the portrait which the Laureate draws of his hero to the misleading and mystification of his readers.

Were it my purpose to consider *per se* the literary merits of the Laureate's ‘Columbus,’ I should call attention to a certain dream-passage, styled by a good-natured

critic, some years ago, a 'perfect wonder of rhetoric.' Nay, I would quote this piece of 'perfection' from beginning to end, and waken, I think, some 'wonder' in the minds of students. As it is, I cannot keep my hands away from it:—I must instance parts of it. Here is one:—

'Not yet—not all—last night a dream—I sail'd
On my first voyage, harass'd by the frights
Of my first crew, their curses and their groans.
The great flame-banner borne by Teneriffe,
The compass, like an old friend false at last
In our most need, appall'd them, and the wind
Still westward, and the weedy seas—at length
The landbird, and the branch with berries on it,
The carven staff—and last the light, the light
On Guanahani ! but I changed the name.'

Here is another:—

'San Salvador I call'd it ; and the light
Grew as I gazed, and brought out a broad sky
Of dawning over——'

Horror ! What is the meaning of this ?

'Of dawning over—not those alien palms,
The marvel of that fair new nature—not
That Indian isle, but our most ancient East
Moriah with Jerusalem ;'

As there is no comma after the word 'East' I am prompted to ask whether Moriah is East ; and if so, whether Eastern Moriah, being most ancient, is more

ancient than Jerusalem? And I should not be quite able to omit the passage beginning with the word 'chrysolite' and ending with 'but no!'

'Chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase,
Jacynth, and amethyst—and those twelve gates,
Pearl—and I woke, and thought—death—I shall die—
I am written in the Lamb's own Book of Life
To walk within the glory of the Lord
Sunless and moonless, utter light—but no!'

Such however, as aforesaid, is not my purpose, and though I have not scrupled to accuse the Laureate of piracy, or plagiarism, or kleptomania, or whatever the politest word may be in this connection, I am not at all inclined to go too far on this unpleasant track. I do not judge the Laureate as a plagiarist *pur et simple*; I judge him as a plagiarist from one particular book. Yet how dreadful it would be if some one dared to hint that the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' is nothing more nor less than a metrical imitation of Drayton's 'Ballad of Agincourt'!

'They now to fight are gone,
Armor on armor shone,
Drum now to drum did groan
To hear was wonder:
That with the cries they make,
The very earth did shake,—
Trumpet to trumpet spake,
Thunder to thunder!'

And who with an English heart in his breast, would care to transcribe from the poems of Ronsard the whole of that Ode from which the Laureate took the sweet song in the 'Miller's Daughter':—

'Je voudrois estre le ruban
Qui serre ta belle poitrine,
Je voudrois estre le carquan
Qui orne ta gorge yuorine.
Je voudrois estre tout autour
Le coral qui tes lèvres touche
Afin de baiser nuict et iour
Tes belles lèvres et ta bouche.'

No one having such a heart would care to do it. The mere copying out of one of the verses has made me feel wretched.

Yes, it is a question of justice;—a question of justice abstract and practical; but it is also, as I have said, a question of literature. Are the days in which we live so fleeting,—are we hurried along so rapidly that we cannot afford to look behind, or glance from side to side to see what is taking place? Is a book merely an article of trade;—is a volume of poems only a toy, good, bad or indifferent, as the case may be, or something national if not educational, to which the nation ought to cling,—by which the nation ought to be moved or instructed? If poems, properly so called, are works of art, or, better still,

works of inspiration, ought they not to be judged as such, and judged from a high standard of criticism? Should a poet, because he happens to be the Laureate, stand aloof from his fellows, and deny at once their right to recognition, and the claims they have to originality? Surely, if a book be property (and the law has clearly decided that it *is* property), a man composing a poem,—say ‘Columbus at Seville,’—must, by the very fact of the composition thereof, become its proprietor. I do not of course pretend that the Laureate, as an independent poet, was disqualified from treating the subject of Columbus. Far from it. No one is disqualified. It is open to all. But I say, and I maintain,—that the attempt of the Laureate is in every way a discredit to him. He has written a rhapsody rather than a poem; he has tampered with the Muse of Ellis,—chucked her under the chin! He has not bared his head before her; he has faced her as a master faces a slave, bidding her kneel and do him duty as Laureate of the language of England. ‘The subject of Columbus is *my* subject,’ he seems to say. ‘Who has dared to take it before me?’ He glances at Ellis. ‘Who is this man? Does anyone know anything about him? This is an intruder. I will have him turned out.’

And thereupon the Laureate begins his work of spoliation. What right has any man to forestall the subjects of Alfred Tennyson? ‘Begone, you fellow!’ he exclaims;

‘you are a poacher on my land. I am the Lord of the Manor, and I will wrest from you what you have taken; I am the keeper of the grounds of English Poesy,—and all the singing-birds, all the breezes, all the sunlight are mine. Everything is mine,—even the song of the stranger walking across my fields.’ The stranger, as I have said, is Mr. Ellis. How has he dared to intrude? How has he dared to sing so loudly and so well,—so boldly and yet so tenderly—in the preserves of English literature?

Will the Laureate explain the rights of his monopoly, and tell us,—as clearly and promptly as may be convenient,—what are the boundaries of his proprietorship?

THE END.

DSB

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